



Frank H. Murkowski, Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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New Measure to Boost Rural Economies **Governor backs new initiative to create visitor industry jobs in rural communities**

(Juneau) -- To further his commitment to spreading Alaska's growing tourism wealth to regions off the beaten path, Governor Murkowski backed an initiative known as the Alaska Rural Visitor Industry Product Development project, which kicked off this month.

"Alaska has so many incredible visitor attractions, including our diverse cultures, spectacular wildlife, and scenery. By packaging and improving access to these resources we can bring new products to the market, and help jump start rural economies," said Governor Frank Murkowski.

While the Alaska Travel Industry Association carries out the states tourism marketing campaign, it is the job of the Department of Commerce to focus on the growth and expansion of the products we need to build and sustain this critical part of our state's economy.

The Department of Commerce's Office of Economic Development worked with the US Economic Development Administration (EDA) on a proposal to provide technical assistance to rural regions of the state where there is high potential for tourism. In many instances, rural communities and the visitor industry have synchronized their efforts to bring stakeholders together to identify the services that are needed and opportunities that exist, in order to build up new tourist attractions. Sometimes, it is just basic research that is needed to help identify specific markets, or basic training in business skills, or training in marketing and website development.

"This is a wonderful opportunity to fill in the gaps that lie between the visitor and *the genuine Alaskan experience*," says Commerce Commissioner Edgar Blatchford. "It is also a good time to look at the opportunities that exist with new or upgraded ferry services, road improvements, and new visitor centers. All of which, should undeniably attract investment by the visitor industry."

The Department of Commerce sought the input of the Alaska Regional Development Organizations and several regional Native corporations to identify a limited number of projects that may already be underway. The response has been very positive. Many community organizations have already requested business development and marketing workshops, customer service training, and assistance in website development. Starting this month, the Department will begin working with local and regional organizations in Southeast Alaska, the Nome and Bering Straits region, the Copper River Basin, and Southwest Alaska on strategies to give their efforts a needed boost.

For more information, contact Economic Development Manager Caryl McConkie at (907) 465-5478, or visit us online at <http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/oed/home.htm>

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